



Aussie Bites

Bernice Knows Best



Illustrated by Stephen Axelsen

Max
Dann

PUFFIN BOOKS

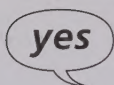
Aussie Bites

Bernice Knows Best

Hugh was a walking-talking disaster without any friends until he met Bernice.

Her specialty was in curing accident-prone boys. But Hugh was a challenge even for Bernice.

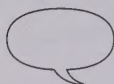
Which Aussie Bites have you read?



BERNICE KNOWS BEST

Max Dann

Illustrated by Stephen Axelsen



JASON PRINCE

Max Dann

Illustrated by Stephen Axelsen



TEACHER'S PEST

Max Dann

Illustrated by Stephen Axelsen



NO PLACE FOR GRUBBS

Max Dann

Illustrated by Peter Viska



THE CHEWING-GUM KID

Bruce Dawe

Illustrated by Tom Jellett



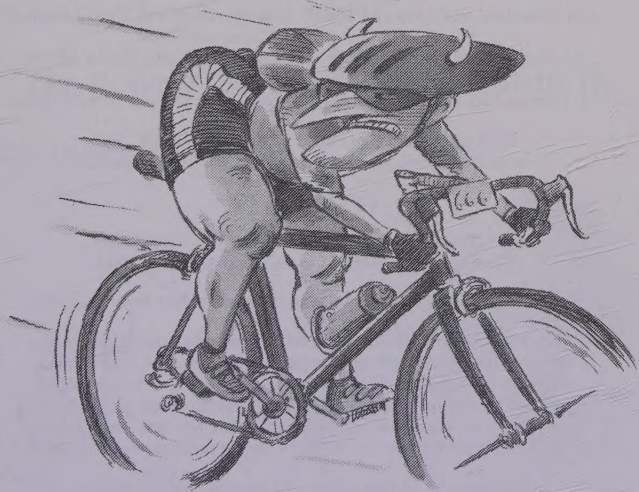
MUMMY'S BOY

Margaret Clark

Illustrated by Terry Denton

Aussie Bites

Bernice Knows Best



Max Dann

Illustrated by Stephen Axelsen

Puffin Books

For mum and Wal.

Puffin Books

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One

Everything started to go wrong the minute Hugh was born.

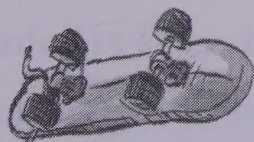
He poked Doctor Haroomphum in the nose by accident.





The big old doctor sneezed, and the nurse stepped back out of the way and bumped the trolley. It rolled across the room, and hit Doctor Fahfahfah in the knee. She jumped and honked like a car horn and landed on one of Doctor Krumdumdum-numnum's toes. Doctor Haroomphum lost his balance, fell backwards and made a big hole in the wall.

Then they had a door straight through to the waiting-room.



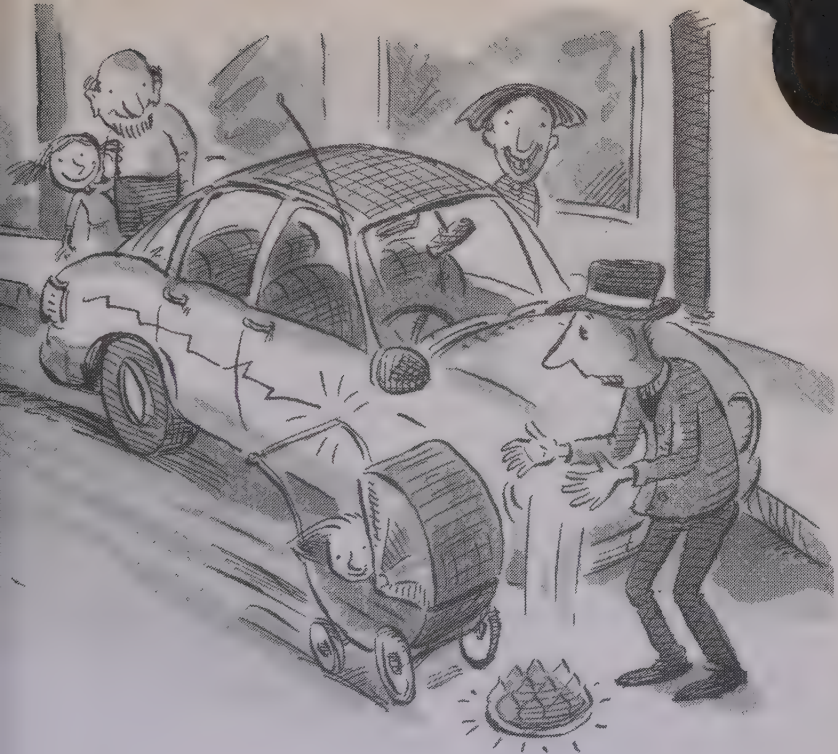
Nobody knew it was just the beginning.



People came and stood around
Hugh's cot and went *ooh* and *ah* and
pulled faces. They laughed at him
falling over his rugs and dropping his
Teddy into the bath.

‘Who’s a clumsy boy then?’

It was Hugh.



And when he leaned out of his pram outside Fifi Foot's shoe repair shop and accidentally pulled the brake off, nobody really gave it a second thought.

Hugh sped down the hill, ran over Mrs Rawling's groceries, made a big

long scratch across the vicar's new car, squashed the vicar's lemon-meringue pie, went through some red traffic lights and ended up in Ms Willow's extremely rare and precious fine-china display.

‘It was just one of those things,’ they said.

Two

Hugh's Great Aunty Agatha came to stay. She even brought her cat. She bustled and sighed a lot and her legs made rubbing noises when she walked.





She made a great fuss over Hugh at first. She took him for walks, turned herself into an aeroplane, and read him stories about princes and elves. She was a lot of fun.



She even stayed on after he stood on her cat's tail by accident.

The cat jumped up and landed on the dog, the dog leapt onto the roof and slid back down and collided with



Hugh's dad (who was busy doing something with the TV aerial). They both crashed through the laundry ceiling and splashed into the bath.

Aunt Agatha was already in the bath.

But who could blame Hugh for that? He'd only just learnt to walk.

Then Hugh opened the oven door and her big dress caught on fire, and he broke her special bowl trying to put the fire out.



She left.

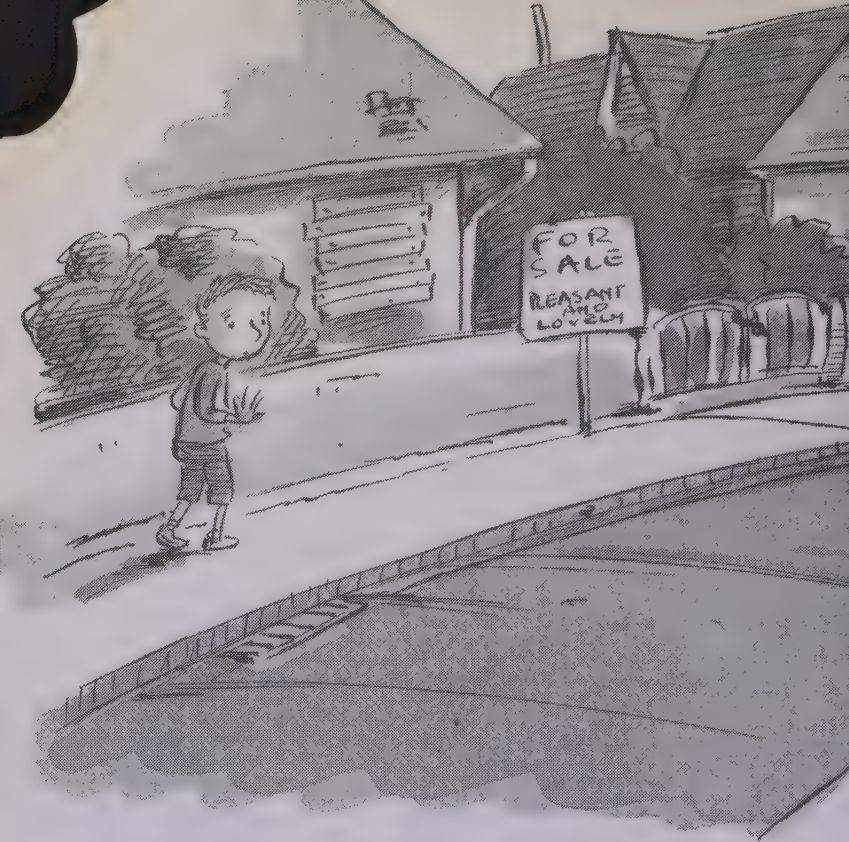
‘He’s not just accident-prone,’ she
huffed, ‘he’s a menace.’

They never saw Aunt Agatha again.

Three

The years passed but things only got worse for Hugh. All of those people who'd called him cute, and sweet, didn't come around any more.





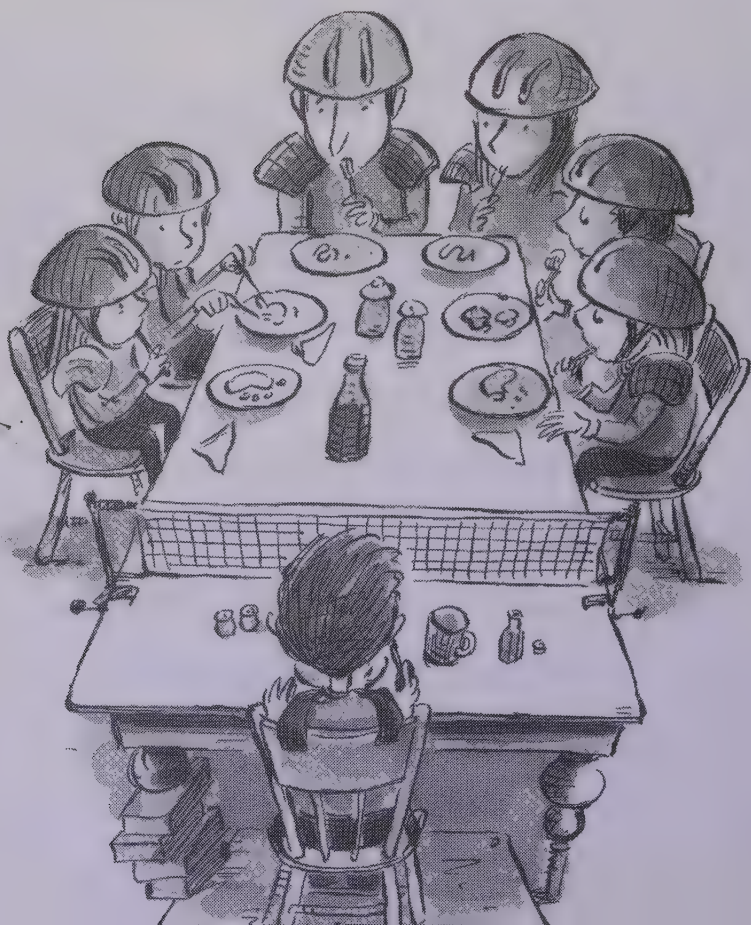
Hugh's name was muttered in hushed tones around the neighbourhood.

Old friends crossed the street if they saw him coming their way. The houses on either side of his became vacant.



His tortoise ran away to Grace's house where it would be safe. His dog was hiding in the backyard somewhere and hadn't been seen for two years, and the cat disappeared altogether.

Only his brothers and sisters and mum and dad stayed. They had nowhere else to go. They wore helmets and protective body armour at the dinner table.



By the time Hugh had turned eight,
his house had caught fire twelve times,
the plumbing had stopped working,
the garage door had jammed and
wouldn't open again, the bath had



sprung a leak, all the chairs had collapsed, and his dad's roses hadn't flowered for three years.

'Why me? Why me? Why me?' Hugh asked.

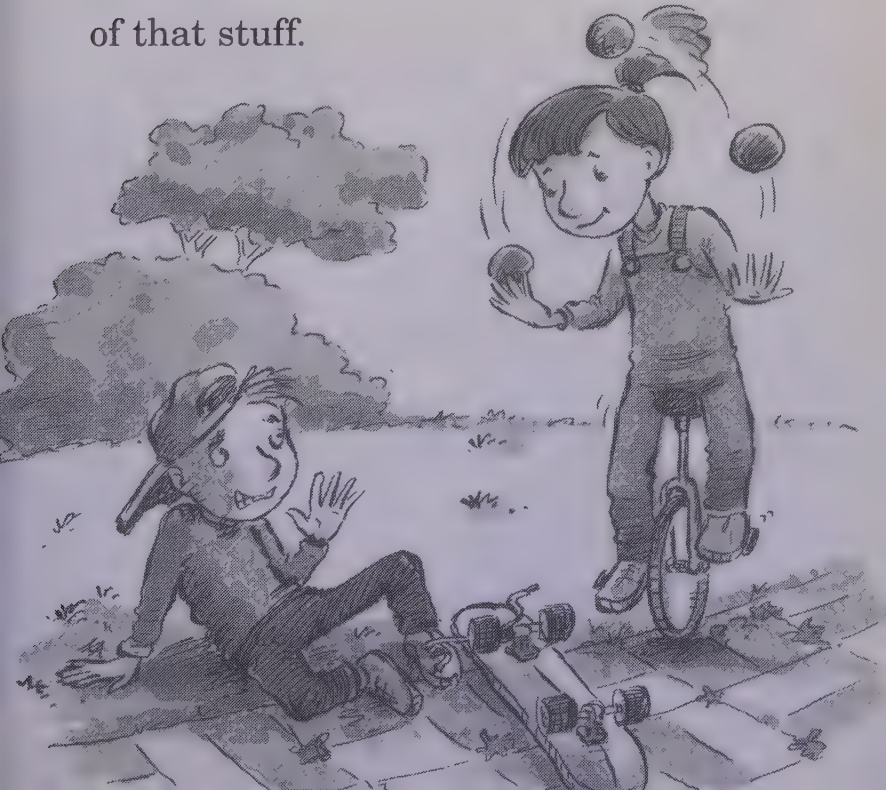
But nobody answered him.

Then something happened.

Four

He met Bernice.

She wasn't scared. She didn't need helmets, or protective armour, or any of that stuff.



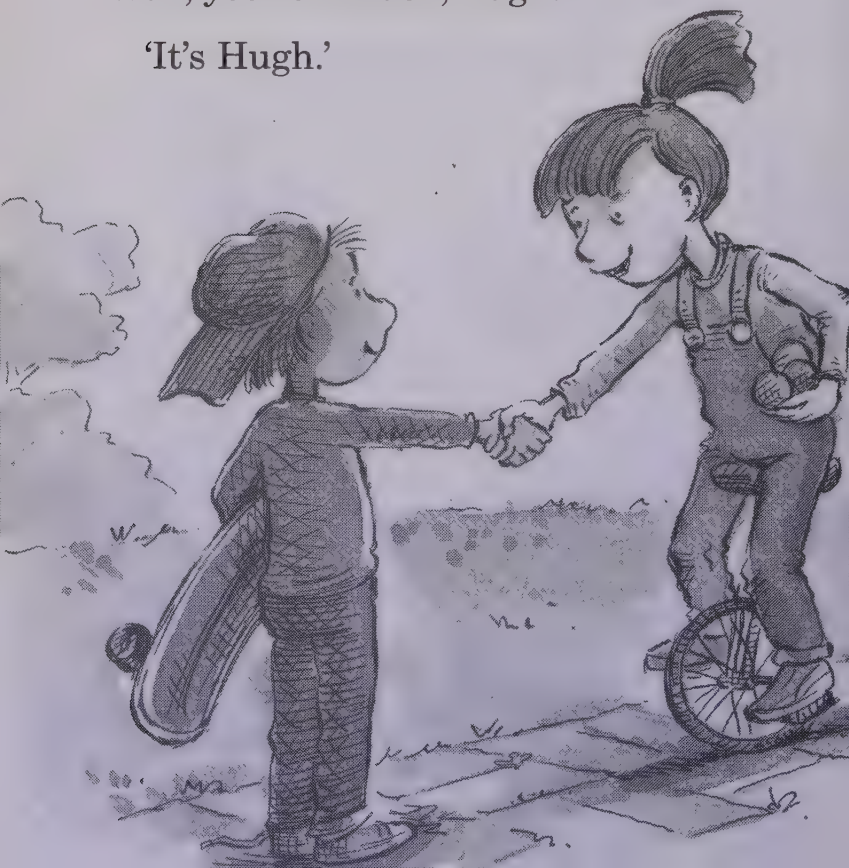
'You wouldn't like me,' said Hugh,
'I'm accident-prone.'

'Who says?'

'Everybody.'

She shook his hand then and said,
'Well, you're in luck, Pugh.'

'It's Hugh.'



‘Because accident-prone is my business.’

She decided then to make it her business.

Bernice was clever too. She could think of a new cure for Hugh to try out every day. And sometimes, if she



really thought about it, she could think of two at once.



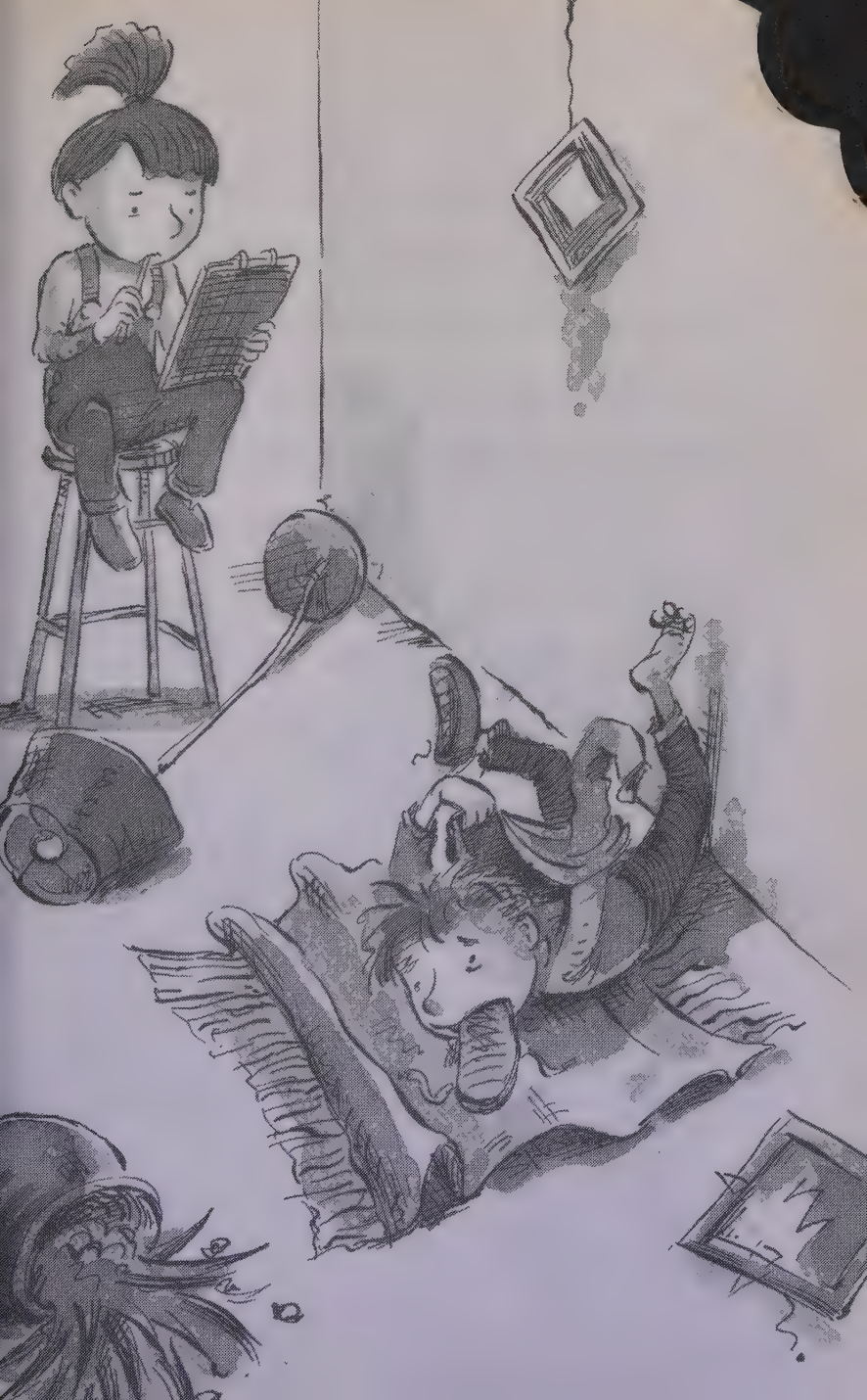
There was the Left Right Off On
Inside Out Cure.

‘Okay, Pugh.’

‘It’s Hugh.’

‘Now, first you have to stand on your head, undo your shoe-laces without bending your legs, and count to fifty. Got that? Then put your left shoe in your top pocket, hang your right shoe from your nose, and take your cardigan off and put it back on again inside out forty-five times.’

It didn’t work.



Then there was the Frog Cure.

‘This one’s real easy,’ Bernice
promised him. ‘All you have to do is
carry the frog around in your pocket
for two days. Except for when you eat.



Then you have to bring it out and hold it in your hand.'

It was the biggest frog Hugh had ever seen. It was bright green and slippery, and did the breast-stroke to itself all the time.

Hugh put on his baggiest trousers and wore gloves. He hated frogs.

Next came the Hot and Sweaty Cure.

'You have to put on all your clothes,' Bernice instructed him. 'And then perform a double back-flip triple-twist from a handstand.'

It took Hugh nearly all day to get dressed.

Five pairs of underpants, three pairs of shorts, six pairs of long pants, eighteen singlets, nine shirts, two jumpers, twenty-seven socks, nine pairs of shoes, one pair of mittens, three hats, and one duffle-coat.



He didn't know how to do a double back-flip triple-twist from a handstand. He didn't even know how he was going to stand up once he had everything on.

Bernice even made him a cake.



‘This’ll fix you up for sure. It’s
a recipe I got from the hidden south-
west corner of the Kilimanjaro,’
Bernice told him.

Hugh had to spend a week in bed
after eating that cake.

Five

Then one day he gave up.

He'd tried everything. Swinging
round and round on the clothes-line,





hanging onto a peg by his teeth,
walking backwards and forwards to
school every day with his shoe-laces
tied together, sleeping in a bed full of
nuts and bolts, and swimming the
whole length of the Footscray Baths
with a bowling ball in each hand.

Nothing had worked.

‘It’s no good. I’ll always be an oaf.’

He wasn’t going to try any more
of Bernice’s cures, and it was just as
well. Because she couldn’t think of
any more.

Hugh became even gloomier than
before. Not even Bernice was going to
fix him, and she was so smart that

she even read the newspapers
sometimes.

‘A drive in the country, that’s what
he needs to cheer him up,’ his mum
said.



‘Yes, some fresh air,’ his dad agreed.

Hugh didn’t like drives.

He said, ‘If you take me, I’ll only break something.’

‘Buck up, Hugh,’ Bernice said. And to make sure he did, she went along too, and sang every single Patagonian folk song she knew.

Six

They drove and drove for hours, until they finally stopped somewhere high up in the mountains.



While Hugh's mum and dad went in search of rare and unusual oyster forks in the antique shops, he and Bernice discovered a crowd of people.

'It's a bicycle race,' she said.

Hugh couldn't see. He stood up on his tiptoes and knocked the hat off the lady in front of him. When she bent over to pick it up, the pointy end of her umbrella poked the man behind, who leapt to one side with a fright and shoved Hugh and Bernice right up to the front. They could see everything then.

There was a whole row of shiny bikes lined up. And lots of



healthy-looking people with shorts on, and muscles in their legs as big as St Bernards’.

‘Here, hold this,’ somebody said.

Hugh looked up. One of the musciest of the lot was talking to him. He had a moustache, and arms



as thin as wire coat-hangers.

Bernice had seen his photo somewhere. He was one of the best.

‘Here, hold this,’ he said again,
‘I have to pull my socks up.’

Hugh couldn’t believe it. The man was trusting him, asking him to hold



onto the bike. Nobody had asked him to hold onto anything for six and a half years.

Hugh went and stood really close to the bike, and held on so tightly his hands started to change colour.

The other riders began to shuffle about and climb aboard their bikes. The race was about to begin.

‘I’ll have my bike back now.’

Hugh went to move. But he couldn’t. His trousers were caught in the chain.

He bent over, the cyclist and his moustache bent over, Bernice bent over. They were all bending over,

pulling and poking, pushing and perspiring. His trousers weren't going to budge.

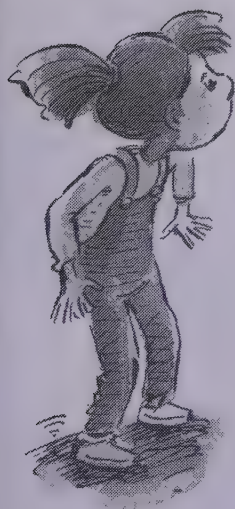
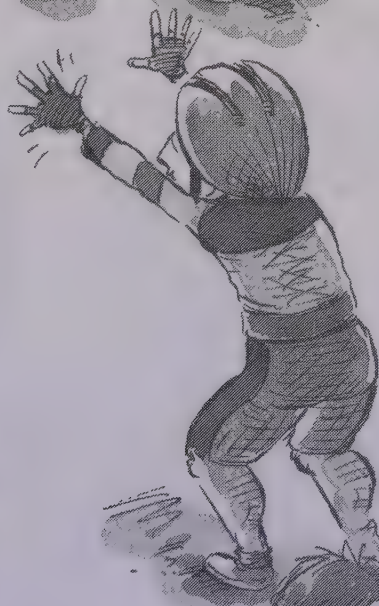
'Hold the race!' One-of-the-Best said, but nobody heard him. The starter blew his whistle, somebody else waved a flag – and they were off, whizzing down the mountainside.

Everybody except for One-of-the-Best, that is.

Hugh knew he had to do something. He rolled forward, put both his feet on the pedals and pressed down as hard as he could.

It was working. His trousers were halfway round the big cog.

ARK TO



'Here – I'll give you a push,' Bernice
said.

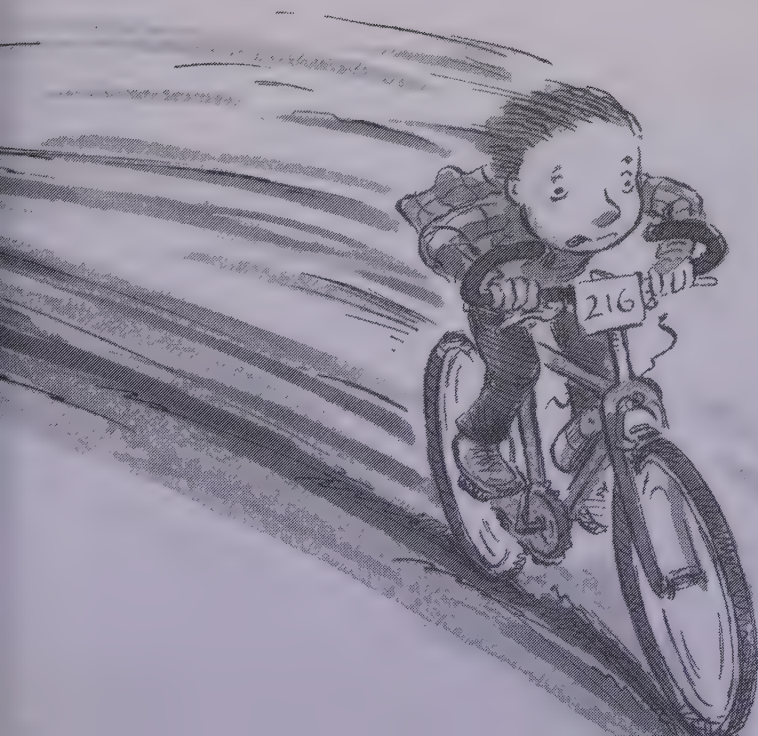
'Nooooooo!'

But it was too late, she'd already
done it.



His trousers came free, the bike bolted ahead, and Hugh was off down the mountain too.

‘The brakes! Put on the brakes!’ yelled One-of-the-Best.



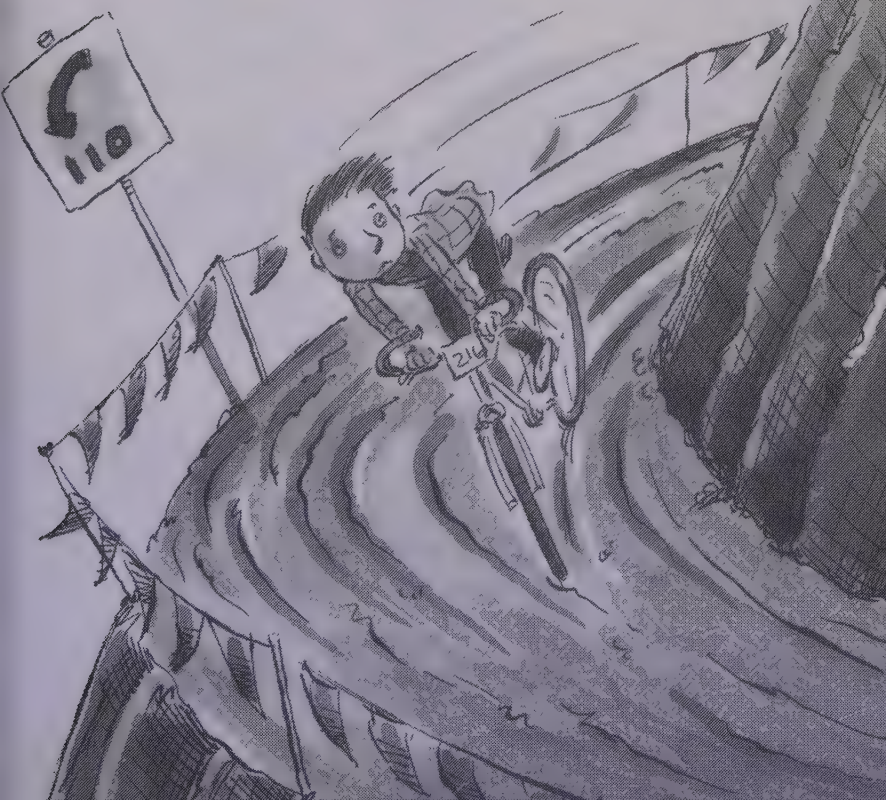


Hugh tried, and they broke.

‘That’s not good,’ One-of-the-Best said. ‘If his brakes are broken, he’s got a problem. It’s downhill all the way.’

Seven

Down the mountain went Hugh. Left
around the first bend, right around





the next, and left again. He was going so fast it felt like his hair was coming out.

This was the worst thing that had ever happened to him. Even worse than eating Bernice's cake.

It was so bad he didn't even notice that he was passing all the other riders.

He did the zigzag turns sitting on the handlebars, the horseshoe bend with one foot in the water bottle, the devil's elbow doing a handstand on the crossbar, and went through the water-trap with the seat stuck in his mouth.

The other riders talked amongst themselves.

‘Quel homme! What a rider, monsieur!’

‘A bonny lad of a rider, for sure!’

‘Si si!’

They had come from all over the world for this race.

‘Wunderbar! Never have I seen such an excellent rider!’

‘Help! I can’t stop!’ Hugh cried out.

But the other riders all laughed.

‘What a card!’

‘Si si! What a joker!’

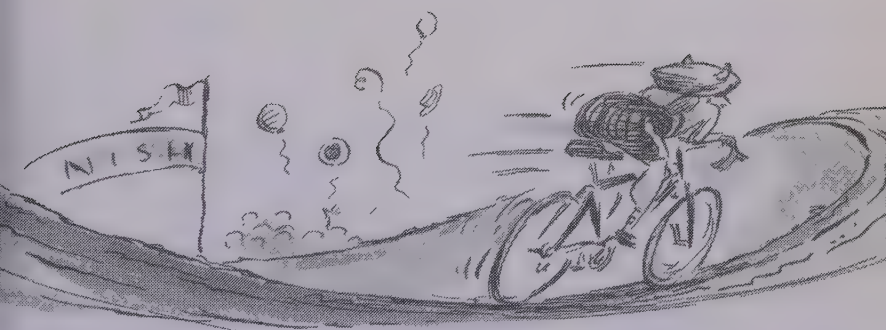
Hugh was going faster now.

He tried turning his shirt into





a parachute, dragging his feet along the ground, pushing things into the spokes, and even grabbing onto the front wheel with his hanky. Still he couldn't slow down, and he lost his



hanky, just to make matters worse.

Then he saw something.

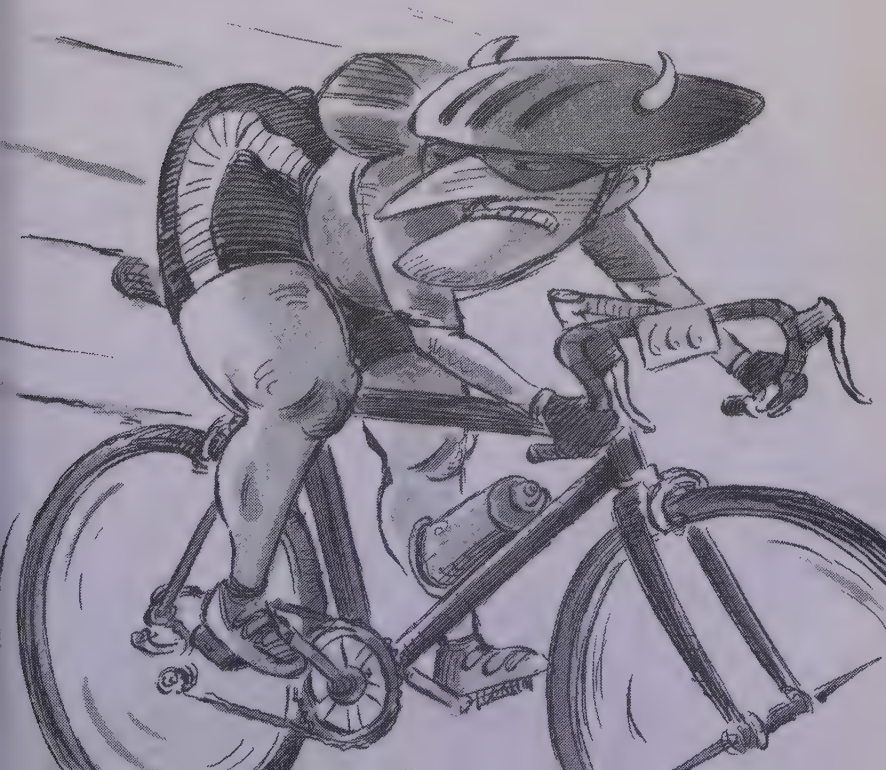
Far off at the bottom of the
mountain was a crowd of people,
jumping up and down and waving.

‘The finish line’, Hugh thought,
‘maybe they can help me.’

He pedalled faster so he could get
there sooner.

Eight

But between him and the bottom was one lone rider. He was the trickiest, meanest, nastiest rider of them all.



It was Rotten Frank.

And if there was one thing Frank hated, it was losing. He wouldn't stand for it. He could see that Hugh was going to pass him, unless he did something in a hurry.

He stopped his bike and got off.



‘Think you can beat Frank, do you?’

Nobody beat Frank in his race. He won it every year. This was Frank’s race.

And just in case somebody thought they might try and beat him, he had a backpack full of Rotten things.



He tried all of them on Hugh.

Frank tried the Box Full Of Tacks
On The Road Plan, the Oil Slick
Scheme, and the Big Cigar That Made
A Lot Of Smoke Trick.

But none of them worked.

Then he tried his real special
Rotten thing. The Inflatable Tiger
That Blew Up As Big As A Train.

Too bad about the puncture, Frank.

Hugh had almost caught up.

Rotten Frank climbed back aboard
his bike and did figure eights in front
of him, but Hugh was already doing
figure nines.





Rotten Frank made loud, scary noises, but Hugh was making louder ones. Rotten Frank even made faces, but Hugh flew past him like a gust of wind.

The little crowd was yelling and



screaming. Hugh sped across the finish line. He'd won the race!

But he still hadn't stopped.

There was a cake display dead ahead. The Country Women's Association had been baking those

cakes for weeks. He was heading straight for them – going to hit . . .

. . . But he missed them.

Then he was heading for the judge's stand, but he missed that too.

He missed everything. He missed Mrs Parker's Poodles, a man selling balloons, the truck that belonged to the man selling balloons, and Mrs Parker herself.

He passed the lot. Then somewhere near the cold-drink stand, without any help from anyone at all, he slowed to a stop.

Nine

The crowd lifted him onto their shoulders, they dipped the bike in bronze, and gave him three cheers.

By the time Bernice and everyone else arrived, Hugh had shaken hands at least twice with each person in the crowd, his photo had been taken eleven times and he'd signed an autograph book. He was famous.

'The Fast Bicycle Ride Down The Hill Cure,' Bernice said. 'I'd forgotten all about that one. I should have



known it would work.'

One-of-the-Best congratulated him, and even Rotten Frank admitted defeat. Somebody took a photo of them both for Frank to put on his wall at home and throw darts at.

The rest of the day went as smooth as old lino for Hugh. He climbed the

steps to the winner's platform without tripping, he shook hands with the judge and remembered to let go, and he mingled with the guests of honour without standing on anyone's toes.



He couldn't do a thing wrong.

'He's cured!' his mum said.

'At last,' his dad agreed.

'I told you I'd fix you up,' Bernice said.

And to make the day a perfect success, Hugh was awarded a special prize. A set of six crystal glasses, with a matching jug.

He broke the jug on the way home in the car. But all the glasses made it back. Well, four of them did, anyway.

From Max Dann

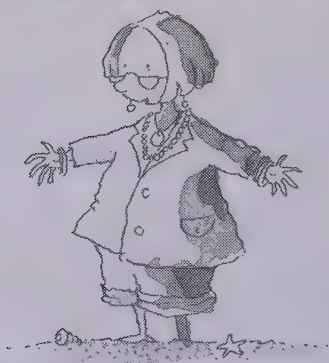
The idea for *Bernice Knows Best* was inspired by true events. When I was young, I knew a girl who was definitely quite accident-prone. I am happy to report that she has long grown out of it, and is completely cured – well almost.

From Stephen Axelsen

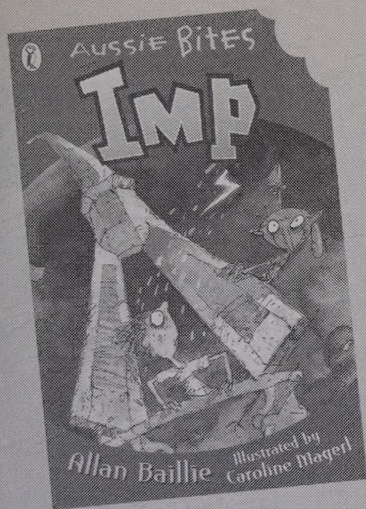
It's great that Hugh is all fixed up finally. But is it really? I can't help wondering if Bernice will still find Hugh interesting now that her work is done. If I were him, I would pretend to be clumsy again from time to time. Or I'd ask her to teach me how to be a knife-juggling bungie-jumper, for instance.

On second thoughts, it might be safer if they become ordinary everyday normal friends, and just bake the occasional cake.

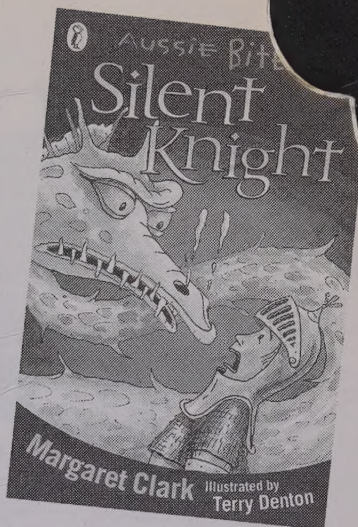
Hungry
for more?



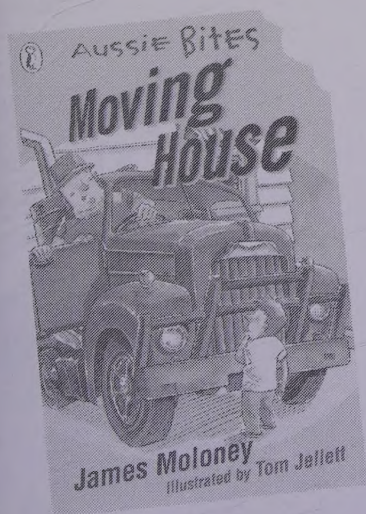
Have a Bite



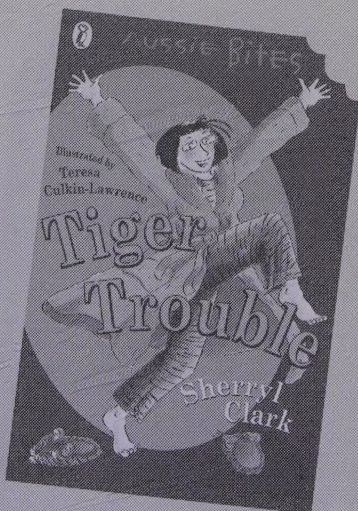
Brian is alone in this
old creaking house.
But is he really alone?



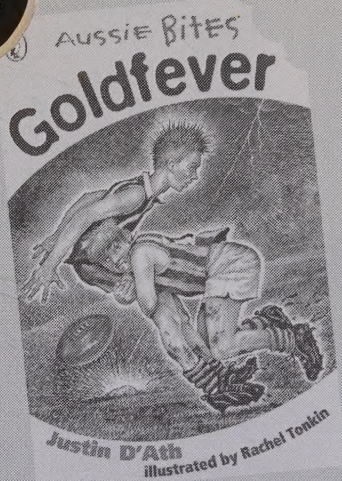
Silent Knight has two fears: meeting a fierce
dragon and Rusting Up. When his horse
Gallbladder runs off on a dark wet night, he
finds that both of his fears come true . . .



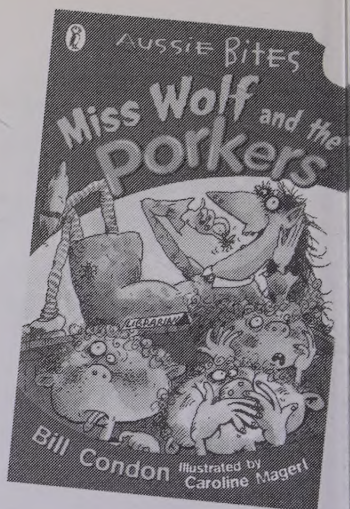
Brian knows the removalists
are taking away the
wrong house.



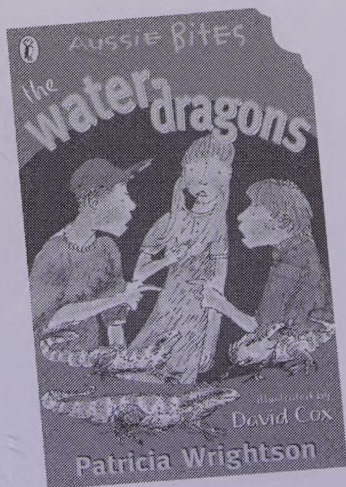
Eric's mother isn't weird. But she
is tall and always gets into
trouble. Why does she suddenly
start tap-dancing everywhere?



Austin finds a gold nugget right in the middle of the footy field.



Are the Porker Kids so perfect? Is little Miss Wolf, the new teacher, so sweet?



Can Sam, Lin and Jerry save their water-dragons in time?



Jammy and Red think Drong Drong Island is their special place. When they discover two girls on their island, the battle is on!



Hugh was a
walking-talking
disaster without any
friends. Then Bernice
came along – with
her amazing cures.

Young readers will love these mouthwatering,
bite-sized stories from their favourite
authors and illustrators.

AUSSIE BITES
You'll be hungry
for more!

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